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THE KERALA STORY
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THE

Commonweal

America the Affluent

Wealth's Uses and Abuses

by Lawrence T. King

Historian or Visionary?

Honoré de Balzac

by Martin Turnell

THE JOURNEY: A POEM . . . . . *by John L'Heureux*
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17th Annual

Spring Symposium

THE CATHOLIC RENASCENCE SOCIETY

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THE COMMONWEAL
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THE
Commonweal
A Weekly Review of Public Affairs, Literature, and the Arts
THIRTY-SIXTH YEAR OF PUBLICATION

week by week

A GREAT T.V. DEBATE?

WRITING recently in *This Week* magazine, Adlai E. Stevenson discussed a problem that is a matter of increasing concern to many citizens: the manner in which Presidential nominees are chosen and the nature of the campaign they must wage in their efforts to win election.

As Adlai Stevenson sees it, the problem is that our electoral techniques have failed to keep up with our national development in other areas. As a result, many of the efforts which will be made by the Democratic and Republican nominees in 1960 would have been appropriate fifty or one hundred years ago but are almost pointless today.

In the process of seeking nomination, for example, a potential candidate will enter various state primaries, spending hundreds of thousands of dollars and exhausting himself in the process. Mr. Stevenson did this in 1956, beginning in January and continuing without rest right up to the nominating convention, after which he immediately had to plunge into the general campaign. If all this contributed to a wider understanding of the issues in the campaign, it might be worthwhile. But, says Mr. Stevenson, primary campaigns do not have this effect at all; most are participated in by a small portion of a state's voters; some are regarded as important only because they are early; all, in Mr. Stevenson's view, weaken a candidate for November and fail to provide a suitable testing ground for a candidate for national office.

When the primaries are over and nominees for each party chosen, the national campaign gets under way, and the candidate faces his problem: "how," in Mr. Stevenson's words, "to communicate ideas on complex issues to an audience of one hundred and eighty million." Whistle-stops represent a time-honored technique, but they reach only a fraction of the voters even if a candidate devotes most of his time to them. Party rallies are of quite limited value; they arouse enthusiasm among the already convinced, but their intense partisanship is more likely to offend than attract the uncommitted voters. Large public meetings have a place, although attendance is largely dependent upon the strength of the local party organization; yet, no matter how many thousands attend such meetings, the number cannot in a two- or three-month campaign account for more than a fraction of the electorate.

THIS LEAVES T.V. as a logical, up-to-date way of reaching voters from coast to coast. But politics on television poses two separate but related problems, both serious.

First of all, there is the question of money. In 1956, Mr. Stevenson reports, half an hour on the networks cost $70,000—a fact that explains, he says, why his speeches so often ran over the allotted time; he was trying to crowd as many ideas as possible into the expensive half-hour. Between them, the two parties in 1956 spent over seven million dollars on T.V., the Republicans a little over four million and the Democrats slightly less than three million. One does not have to be an alarmist to fear that in the future the candidate or party with the most money could easily dominate the air waves.

The expense of T.V. contributes further to an already obvious danger: the tendency to "sell" a candidate like soap, using slogans, jingles, singing commercials and the like—a technique which debases ideas but may be all that can be done in sixty expensive T.V. seconds. In these circumstances the candidate is under constant pressure, Mr. Stevenson reports, to resort to "sloganeering, to huckstering, to oversimplifying." Showmanship and the

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hard sell replace discussion of the great issues; the gimmick crowds out the idea.

We should, Adlai Stevenson believes, try to transform "our circus-atmosphere Presidential campaign into a great debate conducted in full view of all the people." Noting that his great-grandfather had more than one hundred years ago proposed the historic Lincoln-Douglas debates on slavery, Mr. Stevenson makes a similar proposal. Let there be set aside, he urges, an hour and a half of prime T.V. time one night each week from Labor Day to Election Eve. Let the candidates debate the great issues confronting the nation fully and fairly—"debate" not in the collegiate debating team sense of the word but in the sense of sustained and civilized discussion. Only in this way, he thinks, can we attain that level of public understanding essential for our own future and that of the entire world.

Mr. Stevenson's proposal is no political cure-all, as he would be the first to insist, but it does represent a serious approach to a grave national problem. Normally, perhaps, his suggestion might be dismissed as impossible, however desirable, if only because the television networks might be expected to oppose the plan strongly. This year, however, things are not normal in television, and we are not so sure his suggestion will be rejected out of hand. For our part, the idea of a modern Lincoln-Douglas debate strikes us as a very good one, and if we were involved in an industry anxious to put mediocre programming, disc jockey payola and the quiz show scandals out of the public mind, we would seize upon Adlai Stevenson's proposal.

A NEGRO CARDINAL

THE FACT that Pope John XXIII will appoint the first Japanese, Filipino and Negro cardinals at the Vatican consistory on March 28 is especially welcome news to Catholics. But the worldwide attention to the appointments shows that deep interest extends far beyond the bounds of the Catholic Church. That the first Negro to be named Cardinal, Bishop Laurian Rugambwa of Rutabo, Tanganyika, was singled out for particular attention both in the secular and in the religious press suggests some of the reasons for the publicity.

For Catholics there is a special pleasure in seeing two Asians and a Negro among those named to be Cardinals, for they see in the appointments another historical indication of the universal character of the Church. That the great continent of Africa is to have a Negro cardinal is, further, an encouraging sign of the advances being made by that country and by the Church in that country. But what happens to a prominent Negro any place in the world now has almost immediate worldwide impact. And if the story of Cardinal-elect Rugambwa is of special interest to Catholics, whether they are Negro or not, it is also of special interest to Negroes, whether they are Catholic or not.

In the United States, where many newspapers ran the story of the new African Cardinal almost side by side with news of the Senate filibuster on civil rights, the news seemed particularly pertinent. It may be American news reports which led *L'Osservatore Romano* to call editorial attention to the fact that a Negro was being named to the College of Cardinals in the Catholic Church while Negroes in the United States were denied civil rights. The editorial was regarded and commonly reported in this country as a criticism of the United States. It would be unfortunate if that were the only inference to be drawn from the editorial.

The position of the Negro in America is not ideal; he does not, at present, enjoy even those rights to which he is constitutionally entitled. But the situation of the Negro in the United States can be understood only in terms of the historical conditions which shaped that situation, conditions which are changing with increasing rapidity. And one need not overlook or minimize the efforts of those Catholics who have fought vigorously in behalf of Negroes to assert that there are American Catholics who have denied, and still deny, to Negroes their proper rights. In many instances Catholics, both laymen and clerics, have been slow to realize the fullness of the Christian message.

Unless the condition of the Negro in the United States is seen in this context, criticism of our national problem becomes irrelevant. It is true, for example, to say that the Catholic Church has taken many centuries before appointing a Negro Cardinal. But the statement is foolish if it is regarded as a criticism of the Church. Only now has the Church in Africa developed sufficiently to make such an appointment sensible.

We may, as Catholics, regret that progress has been so difficult in Africa; so too, as Americans, we regret that the advancement of Negroes has been so painful in the United States. But it is idle to argue with the past. Our effort must be to understand it in order that we may better transform the present. If the naming of a Negro Cardinal helps Catholics in this country to become more aware of their responsibility toward Negroes, it will be an additional reason to welcome his appointment.

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PIONEERING

PIONEER V is doing beautifully, according to all reports, speeding obediently towards its orbit around the sun and sending back even more and better information than its designers had dared hope.

The launching of this satellite marks a tremendous success for United States science and technology. Pioneer V's three-stage rockets functioned perfectly, as did its impressively elaborate guidance mechanism; its instrumentation, much more sophisticated than any previously placed in space, is working even better than expected. The orbit it will reach, between those of Venus and the earth, will take it 186 million miles away from us, vastly farther into the unknown than man has ever penetrated before. It is, therefore, no exaggeration to say that the launching of this new planetoid represents a great milestone in the history of man's reaches into space.

However, advances in space investigation by the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. have come to be reckoned not in terms of real scientific achievement or usefulness but as propaganda vehicles or demonstrations of military capability. In these harsh terms, what is the significance of "the aluminum beach ball" the U.S. has hurled millions of miles into planetary space?

Undoubtedly, the success of Pioneer V does much to bolster the sagging technological prestige of the United States. The previous and much-derided failures of U.S. missile experiments are now overshadowed by an American space probe far more ambitious and dramatic than anything thus far achieved. Besides extending much deeper into space than the Russian satellites, Pioneer V is packed with more and more useful instruments, including a remarkable miniature transmitter which will permit communication with the earth at distances up to fifty million miles. Furthermore, unlike the earlier satellites, Pioneer V is expected to beam messages to our scientists at least for months and perhaps for decades. The impact of Pioneer V's achievement will undoubtely reverberate all over the world, although the Moscow press, in what will probably be the pattern for the Iron Curtain countries, has relegated news of the U.S. launching to the last pages of its newspapers.

Nevertheless, the U.S. technological advances proved by the complexity and efficiency of Pioneer V's "space laboratory," as it has been called, are balanced by the Soviet Union's undiminished lead in the matter of sheer rocket power. I.C.B.M.'s need not travel millions of miles into space and need not carry elaborate electronic equipment, especially when they are produced in numbers, and in availability of long-range rockets capable of delivering nuclear warheads the U.S.S.R. retains its comfortable—rather, uncomfortable—superiority.

The long-range potentialities of the U.S. Pioneer V, then, are extremely important and a source of real gratification. Unfortunately, however, the short-range implications of the United States' still growing "missile lag" can turn all our long-range planning into mockery. The challenge of Soviet leadership in missile development remains as it was: huge, urgent—and largely unmet.

NEVER SAY DIE

DEFENDERS of those unfortunate and irresponsible Air Force manuals will simply not give up. In response to a question about the charges against the Protestant clergy contained in the manuals, New York's Cardinal Spellman made this statement: "My position as military vicar has given me many occasions of meeting and associating with chaplains of the Protestant faith. During these many years of association I have admired their dedicated loyalty to our country and its purposes. I would deplore it if any unfair deductions from general accusations were interpreted to reflect in any way on their loyalty to our country or on the loyalty of the general body of ministers whom they represent."

An executive of the Protestant National Council of Churches thanked the Cardinal for his "reassuring . . . expression of brotherhood," and one might think that that would have been the end of it. But Rep. Donald Jackson (R.-Calif.), of the House Committee on Un-American Activities, declared that the Cardinal's statement had been "distorted" by some of the press, thereby doing "grievous harm to the fight being waged by many of us here in the Congress to disclose efforts of the Communist Party to infiltrate American churches. . . ."

In reply to Mr. Jackson's charges, the Cardinal wired him that "The statement I made was clear and unequivocal. I cannot understand how some of the press distorted my statement. I respect the fact that Congressman Walter, you and other members of your Committee have rendered outstanding service in exposing Communist activities." Queried again, Cardinal Spellman said he had nothing to add to his original statement. And this, one might well think, should really be the end of it.

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America the Affluent

Have we made our wealth and material possessions not means but ends in themselves?

by LAWRENCE T. KING

TWENTY YEARS ago, most of the income of the average American family was spent on the basic necessities of food, clothing and housing. What was left over was usually expended on items then considered luxuries. The fact is, however, that the luxuries of yesterday have become today's necessities.

The Consumers' Price Index, for instance, is based on prices prevailing in the base period of 1947-1949. Since then, total living costs have risen by almost 25 per cent. Food has advanced to 118.3, clothing to 108, rent or home payments to 139.8, gas and electricity to 120.1, fuel and fuel oil to 133.9, household operations to 134.6, transportation to 146.7, medical care to 151.4, personal care to 131.7, reading and recreation to 119.1, and other goods and services to 131.1.

But far more revealing than this index of price *increases* are the statistics published by the U.S. Commerce Department on personal consumption expenditures. One has only to look at these figures to get some idea of the revolution that has taken place in the American economy and realize, perhaps with a sense of nostalgia, that most of the economic statistics being published today are based on norms which assume a set of values and a way of life which have departed from the American scene.

In 1935, the American public spent about five billion dollars on transportation, mainly automobiles; by 1958 this single expenditure soared to almost thirty-four billion dollars. In 1935, medical expenses cost Americans less than three billion dollars; today the figure has spurted to almost twenty billion dollars. Expenditures on the basic items of food, clothing and housing, of course, have also soared, but increases in these fields have been overshadowed by the spectacular rises in spending on transportation, medical care, personal services and luxuries. In other words, no matter how economically Americans manage their spending on basic necessities, buying a new car or a prolonged illness or hospital stay will knock their budgets out of kilter and put them in the ranks of the deficit spenders.

Obviously the Consumers' Price Index means little to these persons. It may tell how many index points medical care, transportation and personal services have advanced in the past month or year, but this knowledge will not help them to buy a car under the administered price or get medical or personal care any cheaper. Twenty years ago, a study of the price index could be helpful in evaluating rising and falling markets. Today the index figure may decline, but the drop is never more than a fraction of a point and is invariably nullified by a sharper rise a month or two later. At least, that is the consistent pattern which the index has followed for the past decade.

TECHNOLOGICAL breakthroughs also have created an entire complex of new industries—television, hi-fi, revolutionary household appliances such as clothes' driers, dishwashers and garbage disposals—and Madison Avenue has apparently succeeded in convincing the American public that these new products are indispensable to the enjoyment of the good life.

As a result, the spending habits of the American consumer have become increasingly complex. The 293 billion dollars spent in 1958 on personal consumption items represented an increase of 120 per cent over the figure for 1945. But in the same thirteen-year period, per capita personal income increased by about 75 per cent. The disparity between these two figures—income and spending—is explained by the fact that in the thirteen-year period personal indebtedness rose from some 55 billion dollars to 240 billion dollars. The "buy now, pay later" principle has revolutionized American buying habits and has led, it must be admitted, to the phenomenal rise in our gross national product.

How have the American people reacted to this revolution in consumer purchasing and to the affluent society

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which it has helped produce? For the most part, our people accept the situation as a natural development. There are others, however, who are beginning to have uneasy doubts about it, and still others—a distinct minority, it must be stressed—who believe we have created a Frankenstein's monster which threatens our destruction.

Senator Mike Mansfield typifies the disappointment of many of our intellectuals in his evaluation of the past decade as one characterized by "Roman decadence" and a "sickness of the spirit." Carl Sandburg has expressed his contempt for our "fat-dripping prosperity." John Steinbeck, in his famous letter to Adlai Stevenson, wrote: "If I wanted to destroy a nation, I would give it too much and I would have it on its knees, miserable, greedy and sick. . . ." Rienhold Neibuhr has been quoted to the effect that our preoccupation with living standards has lowered our moral and political prestige throughout the world and has created an image of America among Asians and Africans in which our most altruistic actions become suspect.

But if our present affluence has produced a strong reaction among many intellectuals, it has not produced a similar reaction among most national leaders. Raymond J. Saulnier, chairman of the President's Council of Economic Advisers, continues to maintain there is nothing wrong with the American economy. "Its ultimate purpose," he told Congress recently, "is to produce more consumer goods. This is the goal. This is the object of everything we are working at: to produce things for consumers." To which Sen. Joseph S. Clark replied: "The goal of our economy is not the production of more consumer goods at all. The goal of our economy is to provide an environment in which every American family can have a good house for living and shelter, a good school to which to send his children, good transportation facilities and good opportunities for cultural and spiritual advancement."

This exchange is interesting because it provides an inkling of the debate on the American economy which will undoubtedly reverberate throughout the land during the coming Presidential campaign. It is also interesting because it reveals the sensitivity of those who are shaping our economic policy to critics who maintain that our gross national product is not increasing fast enough. In their eagerness to refute this criticism with facts and figures on our phenomenal advance in production, they have told us that the index of private wealth is the criterion by which the nation's economic health must be judged. They have, in short, reaffirmed their faith in the doctrine which holds that the noblest form of human endeavor is nothing less than the acquisition of private wealth—and that the government's role must be held to a bare minimum.

No one, of course—not even the Administration's harshest critics—seriously doubts the ability of the United States to create the necessary conditions for the proliferation of wealth. The important question is: What are we doing with this wealth?

IN HIS *Coming Shape of American Politics,* Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. writes: "Our priorities—which means our *values*—are wrong. While consumer goods pour out of our ears, while our cars grow longer and our kitchens shinier and gadgets and gimmicks overflow our closets and attics, the public framework of society, on which everything else rests, is overstrained by population growth and falls into disrepair. Our communities grow more disorganized, our schools more crowded, our teachers more harried and underpaid, our roads more dangerous, our national parks more unkempt, our law enforcement more overworked and harried, our weapons development and foreign aid more catastrophically inadequate. While we overstuff ourselves as individuals, we let our national plant run down. And it is the national plant—and particularly our national investment in people (education, health, welfare and opportunity)—on which our future so largely rests. Let no one forget that the condition of private opulence and public squalor has through history led to the fall of empires."

The ease with which the average American can acquire material comforts is producing a generation which does not know the meaning of self-denial. We were startled by the much-publicized findings of the book *In All Wars but One,* which detailed the facts that one-third of the American prisoners in Korea collaborated in some way with the enemy and another third died because of physical softness or simply because they had lost the will to live under adversity. It is a hard saying, but perhaps the price we are paying for our chrome civilization is nothing less than a deterioration of the national character and the moral and spiritual apathy evident in rigged television shows, payola, the mediocrity of our popular culture and the stifling conformity of our mass media.

THE REVOLT of the intellectuals is a reassuring sign, and perhaps they are right in directing their attacks at a political leadership which refuses to recognize the validity of their criticism. But there is always the possibility that the people are getting precisely the type of leadership they want. "You never had it so good" seems to have been a far more effective election slogan than those predicated on a "call to greatness" or "self-sacrifice."

There is also the possibility that we have underestimated the extent to which softness has weakened our institutions, which condition our people and shape their outlook on life. The dropping of "hard" subjects in schools, the watering down of school curricula, the reluctance to enforce mental and physical discipline;

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the easy toleration in our public morals (everyone is doing it, so it can't really be wrong); the eagerness of Americans of every religious commitment to proclaim they are really no different from their fellow citizens, although their commitments, taken seriously, should certainly make them different; the emphasis on the practical and utilitarian in our colleges and universities; the institutionalization of philanthropy at the expense of all personal sense of responsibility for our fellow men—all have played a part in producing the "sickness of the spirit" which cannot be ignored in the America of today.

Somehow we have managed to lose sight of the fact that the great ferment of economic reform which stirred the nation after the Great Depression was predicated on the conviction that a more equitable distribution of the nation's wealth would extend the area of individual freedom and fulfill the promise of what Herbert Croly called the "American dream." It was never projected as an end in itself. Today we are enjoying the fruits of that revolution, but we have allowed our increased affluence to bind us to our increased responsibilities and, in many instances, to distort our sense of values.

There is, of course, a dangerous temptation to condemn the very existence of the affluent society. But to fall into that trap is to deny the fact that material well-being and financial security are good things in themselves. When we create the economic conditions which lead to a wider distribution of wealth, we are in effect making it possible for more of our people to widen their own areas of social, economic and political freedom with a consequent broadening of their cultural and spiritual horizons. This is not to be denied.

But if it has not worked out that way, is it not because we have confused ends and means, because we have made wealth and material things ends in themselves rather than merely means to living the good life? The good life presupposes a hierarchy of values—the proper ordering of wealth to enhance the true worth of the individual, to reinforce the fabric of our society, to elevate our culture's aspirations and achievements both.

Until we recognize and implement that fact as individuals—and as a nation, as a society—we must consign to the category of unfinished business the movement for economic reform which began so auspiciously in the lean and hungry thirties and which has been so conspicuously forgotten in the opulence of the fat and fabulous fifties.

COMMUNIST SETBACK

The Kerala Story

by BEDE GRIFFITHS

THE RECENT ELECTIONS in Kerala have given a spectacular victory to the United Front over the Communists. In addition they have gone far to justify the intervention of the Central government by which the Communist government was deposed last July.

In a house of one hundred and twenty-six seats, the United Front, consisting of the Congress and Praja Socialist parties and the Moslem League, has secured ninety-four, while the Communists, who (with their independent supporters) had sixty-four seats in the former house, now have only twenty-nine. Even more significant, perhaps, is the fact that of the eleven members of the Communist government only four have been returned. In the United Front, on the other hand, the Congress party obtained sixty-three seats as against forty-three in the previous elections, and eight of its ten ex-ministers were returned.

The election was remarkable both for the number of votes recorded (between eighty and ninety per cent) and for the orderly manner in which it was conducted. It may fairly be said, therefore, that it shows the mind of the people and has given Kerala a really representative government. But in spite of this there are some very disquieting features in it.

Although the Communists lost so many seats, they actually increased their vote, obtaining over forty per cent of the total cast. There may be several explanations of this; among other things it is freely charged that the Communists disposed of large sums of money, with which they "bought" the votes of the poor. But the fact remains that the Communists were able to secure over three million votes, and this would seem to show that they have not lost the confidence of the mass of the people.

In Kerala, of course, as in all parts of India, everything turns on the poverty of the mass of people. The Communists make a direct appeal to the poor, and the

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majority support the party, not because they believe in its ideology but because it promises to relieve their poverty and offers a clear and definite way of doing so. But there are several features which make the situation in Kerala different from that of the rest of India.

IN THE first place, Kerala's citizens are the best educated in India, and political consciousness is highly developed. About eighty per cent of the people are literate, and there are no less than twenty-five Malaysian dailies in this small state. The fever and excitement before the election was tremendous, and it penetrated into all the villages.

In the second place, Kerala is unique in India for the number of Christians, especially Catholics, which it contains. Indeed, the Communists maintained that the whole agitation against them was engineered by the Catholic Church, and, though this is not altogether true, it does have a grain of truth in it. The Church certainly provided the hard core of resistance to Communism, and it was the Catholic agitation against the Education Act which set the whole resistance movement in motion.

To understand this fact one needs to understand the position of the Church in Kerala. The number of Christians in Kerala is reckoned to be about three and one-half million, nearly twenty-five per cent of the population. Of these the great majority are Syrian Christians or "Christians of St. Thomas," that is, Christians who claim that their ancestors were converted by St. Thomas the Apostle and who make use of a very ancient Syrian rite. About six hundred and fifty thousand of these are "Jacobites," who separated from Rome owing to an unhappy conflict in the seventeenth century, about two hundred thousand are "Mar Thomites," that is, Protestants who separated from the Jacobites in the nineteenth century, and the rest are Catholics, amounting to nearly a million and one-half. There is also a very large body of Latin Catholics, numbering almost one million.

The Syrian Christians are not only very numerous, they are also very well educated. They were, in fact, the pioneers of education in Kerala. To a large extent this was the result of Protestant influence in the nineteenth century, when the Anglican Church Missionary Society began a very fine and extensive work in education. This was later taken up by the Catholics, and they now have a network of primary and secondary schools and university colleges established all over Kerala.

These Christian schools and colleges give the best education in Kerala, and the original cause of the agitation against the Communist government was its attack on the Christian schools through its Education Act, by which it hoped to gain control over them. On this the Catholics managed to get all the other Christian schools to stand with them, and they refused to open their schools under the new act.

This resolute refusal to open their schools and the determination to defend them at all costs set the spark to the agitation against the government. But even at that it would have been impossible for the Christians to have held their own if they had not been joined at this stage by the majority of the Hindus and Moslems, who make up two of the other large communities in the state.

The principal Hindu community, the Nairs, are fewer in number than either the Christians or the Moslems, having about two million four hundred thousand members in all as against two million eight hundred thousand Moslems. The Hindus, however, are a much more influential community, with a much higher standard of education—there is, in fact, a good deal of rivalry between Hindus and Christians in this matter. The Christians were earlier in the field of education and are still on the whole more advanced, but the Hindus now have many schools and colleges of their own and attend the Christians' schools also in large numbers.

BUT BESIDES the Christians, Nairs and Moslems there is another community in Kerala, one which has a unique importance in this situation. This is that of the Ezhavas (pronounced, curiously, "Irawas"). These people are said to have come originally from Ceylon, and they were treated by the Hindus as outcastes. They were deprived of all privileges, allowed no education and refused permission to enter the temples. They might not approach within a certain distance of a caste Hindu and were bound to the meanest occupations.

The fate of the outcaste in India is, of course, familiar, but it has a peculiar relevance to the Communist question in Kerala. These people now form the largest community in the state, numbering no less than three million seven hundred thousand, and it is among them that the Communists have found the mass of their supporters. The Communists have found leaders among the higher caste Hindus, the chief-minister Nambudiripad coming from the exclusive caste of the Nambudiri Brahmins, and they have won over a certain number of Christians, including some Catholics; but the bulk of their support, however, comes from the poor and uneducated, especially from these Ezhavas, who provide the most perfect material for Communist propaganda.

The Ezhavas form the great mass of the poor and underprivileged, and they have a genuine grievance against the society to which they belong. Unfortunately, it has to be recorded that the Christians showed themselves no less exclusive in the matter of caste than the Hindus. The Syrian Christians are of high caste and claim to be descended from Brahmin stock. As a re-

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sult, they would never allow people of low caste in their churches, and they observed the same rules in regard to them as the Hindus. There are many living now who remember the days when a person of low caste was not allowed to approach within so many yards of the house and when the poor man had even to leave the road at the approach of a Brahmin. All this lasted in many parts up till the time of independence. To the credit of the Latin Catholics, their missions have been principally among the low caste people, but even they have made little impression on the Ezhavas.

Early in this century, though, the Ezhavas found a leader of genius in their own midst, a man who began to organize them and to build both schools and temples. From this time the Ezhavas began to gather strength, and now many of them have acquired wealth; they have several schools and even a university college, and they have above all acquired the determination to assert their rights.

It can be seen from all this what a magnificent opportunity these people offered to the Communists. The Hindus and Christians between them had deprived them of religion, of education and of all social rights. As a result they have no religious principles to oppose to Communism, and the Communists alone offer them the way to obtain their rights. It can cause no surprise that these people should vote solidly for the Communists, and this no doubt accounts largely for the strength of the Communist vote.

SURPRISING or not, this state of affairs poses a serious problem for Nehru's Congress Party in Kerala. Unless its leaders can win the confidence of the poor and show that they are determined to raise their standard of living, the Communists may once more come to power. And, unfortunately, the record of the Congress Party in Kerala has been very bad.

It was the almost universal discontent with the inefficiency and corruption of the Congress Party which led many people to vote for the Communists in the last election. Some younger men have now come up in the party, and it may be that they will be able to show better results. But it must be confessed that in Kerala Christians as a whole have shown themselves singularly lacking in any social sense; even now there is hardly any sign of a serious social movement among them.

In many ways the Church in Kerala seems to be very like the Church in so many Catholic countries in Europe. The faith is strong, there is much piety and devotion and a certain amount of superstition, but there seems to be very little social sense. The people are mostly small farmers, living on their compounds, working for their families and deeply attached to their Church, but they do not seem to see much beyond their own concerns to the good of the people as a whole. Some are comparatively wealthy, but they too rarely see beyond their family and their class. Indeed, in Kerala it is very much as one imagines it to be in Italy or Spain, or in Poland before the Communists took over, and the parallel is too close not to be disquieting.

The non-Communists in Kerala have now been given the opportunity to introduce those reforms which are essential: to provide land for the landless; to introduce small industries, which seem to offer the best prospect for overcoming the very great amount of unemployment; and to win the confidence of the people in their justice and integrity. One can only hope and pray that the opportunity will be seized. So far, the United Front has been organized simply on the basis of anti-Communism; it remains to be seen whether its members are able to remain united on the positive basis of religious toleration, educational freedom and social justice.

THE JOURNEY

When stones take
Wing and tremble in the air like so many
Balloons bobbing and trembling, like so many
Moons bobbing approval
To the fall appearance
Of early afternoon, when stones take wing
And I cannot care to have missed coffee
At two-fifteen

Then, then all
The trees are mine, quarreling with bluejays
Burrs, squirrels, moss, caterpillars and
That fat brown mouse
Fuzzy and waddling.
My vision has never been a thing to admire
Not so keen as most though not so bad as some
But when stones

Play like balloons
Above my head and all the rest of it, then
Even I can tell, and I am laughter and singing
Knowing the eye's mind
Pulses with the spell
Of knowing, and winging stones so warm to warm
The heart on, to build the vision on, to set
The mind believing.

When stones take
Flight enlightened by this incarnation,
Balloons brightening the whole air, and I
A new-tongued Zachary
Prophecy, then I . . .
I see it is not possible that my Lady Mary
Go alone the long stone road to make her
Visitation.

JOHN L'HEUREUX.

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LOYALTY OATH

SOMETIMES a writer who takes it upon himself to comment on affairs of the day feels that he is spending time and energy on matters which seem important at the time but which will look pretty silly a few years later. That is how I feel now, writing about the loyalty oaths required of those receiving national scholarship funds. For there is a sense in which it is hard to take the question very seriously. Though great principles may be at stake, and I am sure people involved in the controversy are convinced there are, the whole business strikes me as intrinsically petty.

First of all, the idea of the loyalty oath itself is founded on a ritualistic and perhaps pathological concept of patriotism. In a normally healthy society, loyalty can be presumed, as innocence is the presumption in any normally virtuous society. I do not suppose that even those who dreamed up the idea of the oath in the first place are truly convinced that any appreciable number of college students are disloyal. All they require are reassurances, the kind of constant reassurances a neurotic wife never tires of demanding.

It is fairly useless to argue the case with such people. If you tell them that the gesture they rely on so heavily is pure ritualism, they respond by asking why anyone should object to ritualistic displays of this kind; no one who really loved his country would, they insist, though the clear fact is that many indubitably have. The neurotic wife, for her part, will insist that her demands for reassurance are only reasonable; if her husband really loved her he would not mind affirming and reaffirming that he has been, and intends to remain, faithful. But of course he does object—and if you have to ask why he objects, no one can supply you with an answer you are likely to find satisfactory.

Nor can anyone satisfactorily answer those who ask why anyone who really loves his country should object to loyalty oaths. The very question, I would say, betrays a neurotic element in the questioner's understanding of patriotism. And no amount of rational argument about the subject is likely to change his mind.

There is another considerably more hard-boiled argument for the loyalty oath. The fellow who propounds this case will readily admit that a traitor who is required to take such an oath is not likely to boggle at one more lie. But, he will tell you triumphantly, the oath has its uses: because of it, treasonable Americans who can not be caught any other way can be convicted on a perjury rap. So the oath becomes a police tactic, a means of bringing traitors to justice. Just to spell out this argument, it seems to me, is to display its essential sleaziness. For what kind of mentality does it take to require a protestation of loyalty from a body of citizens, not for its own sake but in order to trap the criminals among them? I am not sure what kind of mentality it takes, but whatever the word for it, it is sick. And the sickness is one we associate with totalitarian societies, not with healthy democracies.

How far should the educational institution go in protesting against political pathology of this kind? Some important institutions, have refused to participate in the scholarship program. Other schools have cooperated reluctantly, mainly schools with small endowments that feel they can not afford to stand on principle.

Still other schools have protested but go along reluctantly because they are unwilling to deprive students of the chance to profit from the scholarship program. This sounds eminently fair, but I wonder whether this is not one of those issues which involves institutions more than individuals? Resisting governmental strings attached to educational grants strikes me as the particular duty of universities rather than of university students. Certainly, if all the nation's colleges and universities stood together, the loyalty-oath requirement would soon be dropped. Where money is involved, one could hardly expect such a united effort on the part of students.

There are a few colleges and universities, it must be noted, which actually support the measure with something like enthusiasm. Their spokesmen are quoted as saying that far from having any objection to loyalty oaths, they are happy to cooperate. Indeed, they do not want the kind of student who would be unwilling to sign oaths of loyalty every time the Government asks him to do so, these educators tell us proudly.

Well, no college wants subversiveness on its campus. But does anyone seriously believe that subversives would hesitate to sign loyalty oaths, unless they feared the possibilities of a later perjury charge? If this is the case, one can only conclude that the colleges which welcome the oath do not want students whose understanding of democratic government is such that they think attaching an oath to a scholarship grant is improper. Either that, or the schools are shockingly anxious to cooperate with a new, unconventional, and characteristically totalitarian, method of guaranteeing citizen loyalty.

In either case, it seems to me that such institutions have mistaken the role of the university in a free society. If they want a campus full of students who will yea-say every Governmental requirement, however silly, they are unlikely to make much of a contribution to our kind of society. If they willingly go along with the have-them-take-oaths-so-we-can-trap-them-later idea, they value too cheaply the independence of the American university.

JOHN COGLEY.

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Historian or Visionary?

by MARTIN TURNELL

"I THINK Balzac is the greatest novelist the world has ever known," Mr. Somerset Maugham once said. Many people in England and America, as well as in France, would agree with him. There are certain French writers who present a special problem for the Anglo-Saxon reader.

Racine, who once aroused complete incomprehension, now has a small and devoted band of admirers, but it has taken nearly three hundred years. Corneille is respected, but unloved. Mme. de La Fayette is unlikely ever to become popular. Stendhal's lesser works are appearing steadily in English dress, but for the majority of English-speaking readers he remains an elusive, enigmatic author. A distinguished Shakespearean critic once explained it very well. "There seems to be nothing to hang onto in one's reading," he said of Racine.

The Anglo-Saxon reader has an earthy, concrete, somewhat pedestrian mind. He is soon out of his depth with the French psychological subtleties, with people who are all jangling nerves and no bodies, and who seem to be oblivious of their environment. He likes to know how they looked, what sort of clothes they wore, what sort of houses they lived in.

Above all, no Englishman can ever quite rid himself of the idea that at bottom a play or a novel is, or ought to be, the biography of an imaginary person. If Molière, Balzac, Flaubert and Proust have always been accepted and are even popular in the Anglo-Saxon world, it is because they satisfy these demands. We can respond to them at a number of different levels, but at one level we can be sure of finding plenty of description and lots of "real characters."

I am not altogether clear why Mr. E. S. Oliver calls his new book *Balzac the European* (Sheed & Ward. $4.25.), or in what way Balzac is more "European" than any of several other famous nineteenth-century novelists, whether they happened to be English, French or Russian. On the contrary, his attractive, well-written, companionable essay dwells precisely on those qualities in Balzac which are most likely to appeal to the Anglo-Saxon reader.

"As a history of society *La Comédie humaine* is respected [he writes]; as a gallery of great characters, a Goriot or a Cousine Bette, it is admired; but, beyond admiration and respect, it is the figures strolling more easily through its pages who inspire affection. Rastignac, Bianchon, Diane de Maufrigneuse, and many others gain a warmth of familiarity as they return throughout the stories, always welcomed with joy.

"The sort of affection known to children [he goes on] in the constant return of familiar faces in their weekly papers, to older readers of Sherlock Holmes and other detectives who prolong their lives through many stories, to all those who delight in further adventures and instalments of their heroes and heroines, is perhaps the most persistent of Balzac's charms . . . They belong to that order of friends who, first known in student days, remain friends for life; a period without news of them produces an uncertain feeling of anxiety."

THESE PASSAGES tell us a great deal about English reading habits and about Balzac. I do not myself subscribe to the view that a novelist should be judged by what is known as his "characterization"; I do not think that to describe a work as a "gallery of great characters" is necessarily a commendation, or not unless the author has much more to offer than that. While we may agree that Diane de Maufrigneuse is an engaging trollop, I cannot see anything attractive, even at this level, of tea with Bette, and I should hate to become involved in the adventures of a Rastignac.

It seems to me misguided to think of the characters in a novel as individuals who might exist outside the covers of the book, and whose lives might be continued or expanded, as Miss Pamela Hansford Johnson has tried to continue or expand the lives of some of Proust's. They are essentially vehicles for the novelist's experience, and should be seen as figures in a total pattern rather than as individuals with whom we are on visiting terms. In other words, it is not, or it ought not to be, a matter of fraternization: it is a matter of impact, a matter of what the characters in their setting *do* to us. And certainly Stendhal's rebels do something to me which is quite different from what Mr. Oliver seems to ask of Balzac.

The reference to Sherlock Holmes, who does indeed seem to have the same sort of "reality" or to invite a response at the same level as Vautrin, is extremely damaging. It brings out the essentially immature ele-

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ment in Balzac's experience—Mr. Oliver speaks somewhere of his "boyishness"—which is evident even in the best of the novels and swamps the weaker ones. It is apparent, for example, in the mumbo-jumbo of *La Peau de chagrin* which Mr. Oliver somewhat surprisingly describes as "the first great novel." We find the same sort of 'characterization' in *Le Père Goriot,* but once again I cannot subscribe to Mr. Oliver's view that it is "central" in the *Comédie humaine.*

What is interesting about Balzac's reputation is that his most ardent readers tend to admire the lesser works precisely because they invite a response at the lowest level. *Le Père Goriot,* far from being a novel about "the genius of paternity," seems to me, on account of its maudlin sentimentality and the melodramatics of Vautrin, to be a thoroughly bad book. *Eugénie Grandet,* which is generally admired and to which Mr. Oliver gives quite high marks, is considerably better than the two books that I have just mentioned, but it is somehow too obviously "a classic," "a standard work" in the schoolboy sense.

The successes of the cycle are *La Cousine Bette, Les Illusions perdues, Le Cabinet des antiques, César Birotteau, Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* (in spite and not because of Vautrin) and *Le Curé de Tours.* But though there are no doubt admirers who live with these books, or rather with characters abstracted from them, the great weakness of Balzac for me is that one cannot live with him in the way that one can with the true masters. He may amuse and entertain us, but he doesn't do anything to us; he doesn't change us. At the end of the novels we are exactly the same person that we were before, whereas it seems to me to be of the essence of a master that he alters the potentialities of experience, that we can never be exactly the same person again.

IT IS significant that though Mr. Oliver's book contains some flattering references to M. Félicien Marceau's study, which is very enthusiastic about characterization, and some respectful references to the boring Saintsbury, there is no mention of Baudelaire. Yet the splendid page, which is tucked away in the weary wastes of the essay on Gautier, laid the foundations of modern Balzac criticism.

"I have often been surprised to find that Balzac owes his great reputation to the fact that he is taken for an observer," said Baudelaire; "it has always seemed to me that his chief merit was to be a visionary, and a passionate visionary." It is a limitation in Mr. Oliver's study that virtually nothing is said about Balzac's outstanding quality, or what the later Albert Béguin called "Balzac the visionary." Balzac has been praised for his intimate knowledge of the worlds of politics, finance and commerce, but what he offers is much less a "*history* of society" than a "*vision* of society."

Balzac was a Romantic and an intuitive thinker. He did not trouble about documentation or field-work: he absorbed his material intuitively, drawing, as great writers are traditionally supposed to do, on his own conscious and unconscious experience. He read a great deal of philosophy, but the thinkers who appealed to him were not scientists of the kind whom Zola was later to revere; they were "illuminists" like Swedenborg and Saint-Martin.

He did not sit down and plan the *Comédie humaine* as Zola sat down and planned the *Rougon-Macquart:* the idea of it came to him in a flash of inspiration after the publication of the *Médecin de campagne* in 1833, and it was not until the Preface to the collected edition of his works in 1842 that he developed his theory of "social species" corresponding to zoological species. Balzac's Preface is as much a work of fiction as the novels it introduced: Zola's *Experimental Novel* is a pseudo-scientific treatise.

THE WORLD in which the nineteenth-century novelists found themselves was very different from the world which had produced the French classic drama and the French classic novel. They tried to devise a form which would include the whole of life. Their solution was the cyclical novel of the type of the *Comédie humaine* and the *Rougon-Macquart.* The focus shifts from the emotional predicament of the human couple in a finite world to cosmic problems: to the rise and fall of empires, to conflicts between religion and science or capital and labor, to political and economic change. They aimed not merely at a social, but at a *total* vision of the human condition. Balzac's work was an attempt to produce a "human comedy" which would be the counterpart of Dante's "divine comedy," and his title shows that he intended it to have, in its own sphere, the same completeness and the same finality.

It was impossible for a writer living in an age of doubt and confusion to offer the serene, untroubled vision of a Dante. The disappearance of a stable society, the need to rely on improvised philosophies and the attempt to create a unified vision of a divided world imposed an immense strain on him. The strain is apparent in his much criticized prose style: in the feverish, melodramatic tone of many of his descriptive passages, with their violence, their extravagant images and their clumsy syntax. Yet it was precisely the difficulties under which he labored that account for his peculiar qualities. He set out to give a description of what he knew as "reality," but it at once became distorted, assumed symbolical shapes, and those shapes are the vision. What is remarkable in Balzac is his perception of the ravages of evil in a doomed society; what was to redeem Zola was his extraordinary picture of the Empire on the brink of collapse.

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ONE OF THE signs of a master is that he has no posterity, or at any rate no legitimate offspring. Racine marks the summit of French classic tragedy. He also marks its end. His work could not be continued or developed. The heirs of Racine found themselves with a bankrupt estate. And it is said with some truth that Proust killed the psychological novel: there was nothing left to do. It is far otherwise with writers of the second order, with a Flaubert or a Balzac. Their influence is seminal.

Flaubert, with his counterpoint and his recurring images, was the real creator of the contemporary novel. Balzac's influence has been almost equally fecund. True, he must bear some responsibility for the Romains and the Rollands, perhaps even for the Galsworthys and the Bennetts, but there is a much brighter side to the picture. What is most impressive in him is precisely the combination of social realist and visionary. It is a commonplace that without the *Comédie humaine* there would have been no *Rougon-Macquart*. What is less generally appreciated, what is far more serious, is that without the *Comédie humaine* there would almost certainly have been no *A la Recherche du temps perdu,* where in a novelist of far greater stature we find a similar combination of social analyst and visionary.

It is sometimes said that Naturalism was a sort of aberration in the French tradition. Zola and Proust are treated as opposites. This view is no longer tenable. "Zola is not a realist," says Proust's Duchesse de Guermantes; "he's a poet." That is true. In spite of the antiquated scientific theories and the sub-title of the *Rougon-Macquart* cycle—"The Natural and Social History of a Family under the Second Empire"—Zola, too, offers a poetic vision of his age. The main line, "the great tradition" of the French novel, runs through Balzac and Zola to Proust: the three "visionaries" of the reign of Louis-Philippe, the Second Empire and the Third Republic.

PRIESTED

Unknightly there, we sprawled on palace floor,
transfixed
by Spirit-lance; our suited armour Christ, our
only weapon love.
Then by toast of heavenly mead, plighted our fealty
and adoration told.

Consuming chalice, were we the ones consumed?
Had Galahad-quest ended with this cup?
Or just begun?

Arise, sir priest, and first go slay
the dragon of thine own crusading self.

JAMES E. O'LEARY.

THE SCREEN

THE HEART IS A LONELY HUNTER

FRANCE'S New Wave of young directors, who have put some vitality into a sagging French cinema and have livened the American screens with such thoughtful films as "The Cousins," "Black Orpheus," and "The 400 Blows," will soon become the tired Old Wave if they don't change their tune. Preoccupation with sexual themes has made them Johnny-One-Notes. With its intimate and prolonged sex sequences, "The Lovers" went far beyond the bounds of decency and good taste. "The Chasers," the latest of the New Wave pictures to come to these shores, goes as far in its own way.

"The Chasers" starts amiably enough as a kind of French "Marty" with several young fellows on a Saturday night in Paris determined to go out on the town in search of companionship and love. Freddy, played by Brigitte Bardot's handsome young husband, Jacques Charrier, considers himself quite a Don Juan; but beneath his cynical attitude, he is convinced there is *one* woman for every man. As his companion for the evening's adventure, he teams up with a stranger, a shy bank clerk named Joe who is completely inept at this business of picking up girls. Joe is played with appealing charm and sensitivity by the French music-hall star, Charles Aznavour.

The two whirl off in Freddy's convertible—getting nowhere at first. Two girls who practice Judo are rejected. Then the two boys are turned down in a delightfully comic sequence in which two pretty girl students bring them to laugh at themselves. They try the air terminal, but Fred turns down the easy pick-up who is obviously out for money. They try the Arcade where pick-ups are plenty. While Fred is wisely sending home a girl too young to be out, Joe foolishly grabs onto a couple of Swedish Lesbians.

No longer light and amusing, "The "Chasers" becomes a very serious film. Led by a drunk, the two boys and the Swedish girls go to a party in an elegant house where they little realize what they are getting into. An orgy with a melange of drunks, homosexuals, sadists and other thrill seekers, is on in full swing. Even blasé Freddy and pleasure-pursuing Joe are taken aback. When Joe tries to rescue a girl who is as out of place there as he is, Fred has to rescue him from his tormentors. After a brutal fight, the three of them flee in disgust.

No doubt Jean-Pierre Mocky who directed the film (and wrote its script with Jean-Charles Pichon and Louis Sapin) suggests that Freddy and Joe do have a certain selectivity and a point beyond which they will not go. Like so many of the other films made by the

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New Wave directors, "The Chasers" is an amoral affair, reporting what goes on and leaving the audience to draw its own conclusions. Cinematically, "The Chasers," with its handsome photography of Paris and good acting, is extremely well made; but as a study of two men on the town, its evidence is inconclusive. It doesn't go deep enough into causes; it goes too far into sensational effects. The French "Marty," alas, is superficial and slick.

MOVIEGOERS who want to see more of Brigitte Bardot's husband will also find him in another French movie, "Babette Goes to War," in which the famous B.B., herself, plays the lead role. She and Jacques Charrier portray spies whose special assignment is to kidnap the German general who, in 1940, is making the plans for the invasion of England. Supposedly a comedy, most of this is not very funny. The story is rather dull, and the dialogue (some prints have English sub-titles and some are dubbed in English) is only mildly amusing.

Audiences who survive the first half of the film will get some real laughs, however, when Babette finally reaches Paris, is arrested by the Gestapo leader and is forced to spy on the very man she hopes to kidnap. This Gestapo chief is played by Francis Blanche in a sort of zany caricature manner reminiscent of the madness of the Marx Brothers; and many of the scenes between him and the pert Bardot are a riot of absurdity. No doubt Producer Raoul J. Levy and Director Christian Jaque deserve credit for trying to do something different with Brigitte Bardot and allowing her to keep her clothes on through most of the movie; but it is unfortunate that their elaborate production, done in CinemaScope and color, doesn't sustain throughout the whole film the bright satire and light humor it has in some scenes.

PHILIP T. HARTUNG.

BOOKS

An Immediate, Concrete Step Toward Unity

A MESSAGE TO CATHOLICS AND PROTESTANTS. By Oscar Cullmann. Eerdmans. $1.50.

By DANIEL J. CALLAHAN

THE SUREST way to bring out the depths of the division between Catholics and Protestants is to suggest an immediate, concrete step toward unity. Friendly ecumenical discussion is fine; no one has to act and charity appears to be served. Perhaps it is up to a point. But to act, that is to live what one talks about—that is the decisive test of good intentions. Oscar Cullmann, Professor of New Testament at the University of Basel, and a renowned Protestant New Testament exegete, recognizes with uncommon intensity that a desire for Christian unity unmatched by action avails little. His small book has a single purpose: to propose a specific way in which Catholics and Protestants can express their respect for one another and visibly show their solidarity in Christ.

The proposal is direct and simple: "My proposal is for an offering for one another, by the Catholics for poor and needy Protestants, by Protestants for poor and needy Catholics, which both sides would arrange for the Sunday of the yearly week of prayer." With a delicate sensitivity to the doubts and objections of the skeptical, Professor Cullmann sketches a plan for carrying out his proposal which would avoid theological and practical pitfalls.

The idea for a reciprocal offering was suggested to Professor Cullmann by the practice of the primitive Church. One way in which unity was then expressed was by a joint offering from the Jewish and Gentile missions for the poor of Jerusalem. Its purpose "was to be the external sign that the two groups would form *one* church," each retaining its own individual characteristics.

Professor Cullmann stresses that this is no more than an analogy, for Catholics and Protestants are divided today on the nature of the Church itself. But if a comparable gesture in our era could not visibly demonstrate unity, it could be a symbol "of *solidarity*, of *brotherhood among all who invoke the name of Christ.*" Such an expression of solidarity would demonstrate the desire for unity by means of one small sacrifice toward unity. For it is undeniable, as he reminds us, that without mutual sacrifice no human group, not even the Church, can have unity.

What gives Professor Cullmann's plan its cutting edge is that, if carried out in the way he details it, it would not entail even indirectly the one sacrifice which neither Catholics nor Protestants can make: the recognition of the church of the other as a legitimate church. The reciprocal offering should be "not an offering of a 'church' for a 'church,' *but rather of separated Christians for separated Christians.*" Carried out in an ecumenical spirit it would help us "to recall in a concrete manner that those belonging to another confession are not only brothers, but also brothers in Christ."

There are many ways of praising Professor Cullmann's book which is at once utterly Christian, charitable and realistic. But there is only *one* relevant way to give it praise: to take his proposal seriously. To my mind, it is as sound as it is simple, as idealistic as it is possible. There is only one thing the proposal assumes: a desire for "solidarity." How Catholics and Protestants greet his challenge will be one measure of the reality of the desire.

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The World of Foundations

FALSE COIN. By Harvey Swados. Atlantic-Little, Brown. $4.

By THOMAS F. CURLEY

ONE DAY a big, bearded sociologist from the great Northwest was walking through the Washington Market in downtown New York. He saw all the pimentos, all the cheeses, the tumorous potatoes, the carroty carrots, the salamis and the pomegranates ranged side by side and he exclaimed to his wife, who was by his side with her notebook, "We do it for our stomachs. Why not for our minds?"

That's how the Pilot Project at Harmony Farm was born. The sociologist got in touch with the great foundations and one or two individual millionaires whom he persuaded to form a board of directors. Once he had the money, he went out looking for talent. He persuaded a top-flight writer, a top-flight musician, a top-flight director and his starlet wife, who was on her way up the stairs of fame, to join him in his "massive attempt to heal the crazy split between mass culture and art. . . ."

Everything was going great. The best people were involved. There was no commercial pressure. The sociologists were having a great time measuring the reactions of the villagers of Harmon (Harmony Farm is the place name, but it's in New York this century instead of Indiana) to the work in progress which, ultimately, would be a novel, a play, an opera, a musical and maybe even a T.V. show. And then the powers that be, just about all of them, ask one Ben Warder, a sound engineer, to join the project.

Ben Warder is the narrator of Mr. Swados' story. He is fifty years old and lonely, having lost his only child, a daughter, not long ago and even more recently having been divorced from his wife. Warder just wants to get away and rest up for awhile. Not at Harmony Farm, he is told. The Project going on up there is exciting, disturbing, full of promise and of tensions, too. Warder goes anyway, and signs up on his first look-around primarily because the bearded sociologist's wife asks him please to be co-operative.

He is and he isn't. First of all he's a serious man who has loved and lost a child. Therefore, he is most sympathetic, if not completely cooperative, when the wife confides in him that her husband won't give her a child. He is, however, quite uncooperative when he is asked to go along with a minor infraction of artistic freedom. The artist himself doesn't object too much but Ben Warder feels that he must resign. The fact that his decision to resign coincides with the beginning of hearings by a Congressional subcommittee on the subject of tax-exempt institutions is most inconvenient for the Pilot Project, since the rich men and women on the Board of Directors dislike unfavorable publicity.

When Ben Warder testifies he tells the truth as he sees it and that truth sends everyone scurrying, the millionaires back to more conventional enterprises, the sociologist back to college (though he is persuaded to father a child) and the artists back to working alone.

This is not the hilarious book it might have been had Swados let his indignation romp; it is, however, a truly serious book, something I wouldn't have believed possible. I think Swados succeeds because he uses his narrator so skillfully. Ben Warder is certainly not a hero; but neither is he the anti-hero, the little man of much recent fiction who attracts our sympathy or pity because he is such a slob. No, Warder is an average man of average intelligence with the usual share of malice. That should not be missed in a criticism of this work.

By taking a situation and a story that few good writers would tell save with tongue in cheek, Swados has made a novel that stays in the mind long after one's impatience with the mediocre prose has passed.

Ignore the quotations in the front of the book and don't identify with the narrator, and you'll be surprised how interesting the book is. At one point, the writer at the Project tells the narrator, "we [artists, I take it] can't afford not to be naive." The same thing goes for readers. It's the only way to heal that crazy split.

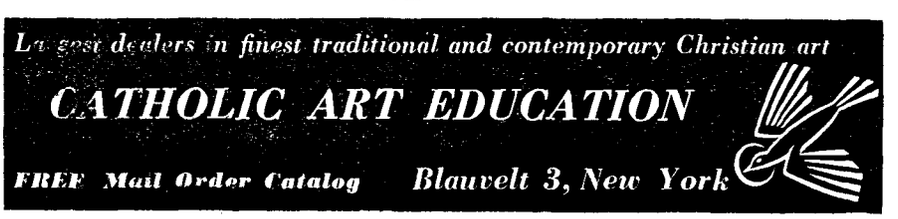
O'Hara and the Middle Way

OURSELVES TO KNOW. By John O'Hara. Random House. $4.95.

By WILLIAM DUNLEA

JOHN O'HARA has gone complex on his critics. The hero of *Ourselves to Know* is not only dull, he is *supposed* to be dull. That he is complex is confirmed by his irrepressible habit of contradicting himself throughout the book. And while it cannot be said that he comes to know himself, he is determined that no one else will. The ironies of disenchantment!—especially for critics; because with his latest novel it must, as with all O'Hara's work, be either yea or nay, there is still no middle way.

The novelist whose hero is a self-confused bore must either attempt to show that boredom can be beautiful; must meticulously probe the hero's closets for at least one rattling good skeleton; or he must surround him with a pretty roisterous retinue. Mr. O'Hara has done all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three. He has also labored manfully for narrative point of view, with results that might embarrass James himself. Thus the story of Robert Millhouser is told at second remove by Gerald Higgins, who, after pages of backing and filling, got it straight from the source.

Higgins, a cynical collegian, is the most obtrusive cliché in the book. "I have often wondered," he wonders, "as I watched newsreels . . . what the anonymous cameraman was thinking and doing"—and so out comes the file on Higgins. In time we get back to Millhouser, and time is something there is plenty of in this book. Higgins starts writing in 1927, when Millhouser is already well into decline and repenting at leisure; his life "ended" in 1908, when he was not much over fifty, the year he bolted routine momentarily to murder his wife. An only child of landed Pennsylvania Dutch gentry, he has known little but loneliness most of his life. He had been content to buy his pleasure until eighteen-year-old Hedda Steele offered him his last chance for love.

But those who follow the author closely will see that it is not such obvious factors as their disparate ages or Hedda's *fatalisme* that set the stage for tragedy. The real tragedy is that a lethargic, uncapricious pillar of the community commits a crime of would-be passion which only intensifies his lethargy; and in the eyes of the world—and hadn't the whisper of Hedda's infidelity been heard as far as the state capital?—he thus remains such a "nice" man that he is not only acquitted, but dear old Delta Psi wouldn't hear of his resigning.

The book sags with the irrelevant detail of the peephole psychologist, sophomore sociologist and encyclopedic ham. O'Hara does not seem to know that such excess can make even believable characters less convincing; but of course he was a fictional pioneer of the status symbol, which is now hitting pay dirt in all directions. (He is also the daddy of all those regional social journalists who want it understood that their talent has always presumed to higher things.) Would the reader care to know when the Johnsville Country Club was organized? He need only consult the footnote on page 289, and for more of such deathless data there are other footnotes. No crumb of monosyllabic dialogue is skimped, nor an acceptance speech not quoted in toto. This labor over things often leads to listlessness over facts.

O'Hara, the dauntless sexologist, can be counted on, once he has listed the daytime occupation of his most casual bit players, to launch into the most salient details of their sexual habits. There are so many bit parts, in fact, that sometimes the most diligent reader cannot help exclaiming: "Who is George!" The only thing the author doesn't describe at length is the ladies' clothes, and that is because they seldom give him a chance.

O'Hara displays an unusual number of crochets here, most crudely his interdenominational displeasure with the clergy; it is a note of this that his most sex-demonized villains are men of the cloth. He also makes some pathetically smug attempts at playing the amoral moralist, which are climaxed by his assigning the ultimate wisdom—*carpe diem*—to the torpid Millhouser.

Fiction from Theory

THE GRASS. By Claude Simon. Translated from the French by Richard Howard. George Braziller, Inc. $3.75.

By EDWIN KENNEBECK

THIS is an almost unreadable novel about the benighted relatives of a virtuous old woman who is dying. Her name is Marie; she is eighty-four—fifteen years older than her brother Pierre, whom (with another sister now dead) she brought up with unquestioning devotion and generosity. Pierre, a university professor, is married to a woman who wears bright cosmetics, dyes her hair red, and imagines that her husband—though he is almost too fat to move—is deceiving her with another woman. Their son Georges, now wasting the family money, is married to a girl named Louise, who hates him. She serves as the central consciousness of the story, which takes place in and around a house somewhere in France, where the characters are waiting for the old woman to die.

There are arguments between the two married couples, death rattles from Marie's throat, long speculations on the passage of time, on change, and on the waste of life, symbolized by the pear orchard near the house—a strangely thriving grove of trees which drop their fruit too soon, so that "they rot before

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they get ripe," and send forth a strong smell of decay.

But blindingly prominent over all the evidences of intelligence and feeling in this book are the overlong paragraphs, intricate parentheses, and loose participles. M. Simon writes in a manner that is hyper-Faulknerian but lacks the forward surge of Faulkner's best writing. His purpose evidently is to pack together, as if in an instant, the elements of his story—to create before the reader's eyes the struggle between the eternal instant and the eternal siege of time.

Here is an almost random example: "And: the man-mountain, or rather the misshapen mass within which the old man was imprisoned, as though muzzled, immured in his own flesh, this same flesh busy feeding itself (or rather destroying itself: as if by the effect of a facetious malediction, of an imbecile and mortal revenge of matter, the natural act—of digesting food—destined to maintain life now concluded in a result somehow inverse: its slow strangulation by its very excess), the hand holding the spoon, then the fork, accomplishing its function without, apparently bothering with the mind's assent. . . ."

Most of the narration is based on this participial construction—not "the man-mountain fed itself," but "the man-mountain feeding itself." Consequently—as a result of the author's admirable attempt to follow through a theory about fiction—the reader's mind is seldom allowed to seize on anything.

M. Simon uses parentheses with daunting profligacy. Sometimes they occur within pairs-within-pairs of them, and thus, on the most elementary level of all, give the reader the distracting task of matching the openings with the closings. This problem is compounded by the unfortunate fact that some of the opening parentheses have no closing mates at all—presumably by accident. Still another Faulknerian habit is M. Simon's use of two terms where one will do: "like, comparable to, a brief death," or "the old illiterate peasant who had thought, believed, that his children. . . ."

The Grass has evidently been very well translated by Richard Howard. Its good qualities do become more evident on a second reading, once one has come to recognize the characters and the author's eccentricities. M. Simon achieves a fierce mood of hopelessness, through which we hear the characters' cries of dismay: often the scene is like one of Vuillard's gaudy, claustrophobic interiors. The comments on time and personality and death and human encounters are perhaps not as profound as they are meant to seem, but they link together (all too intimately) the elements of what might have been a very good novel.

REVIEWERS

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